

HUR OPERATIONS IN SIND

Hurs—Part I

WISAL MUHAMMAD KHAN

(Major General Retired)

In 1942 the population of Sind consisted of approximately 73% Muslims, 25% Hindus and 2% others. The Majority of the Hindus were business men and shop-keepers and were therefore financially better off than the average Muslims. The former resided in the towns and large villages and the latter in small villages and isolated huts. The Hindu Muslim relations were most cordial and the land owners exercised great influence over their tenants.

The Hurs* are of Arab origin and are said to have migrated from Central Asia, initially settling along the Arabian Sea coast and then spreading all over the Province of Sind There are also a large number of Hurs in the states of Rajputana. They are sturdy, ruthless, cruel and fanatic always prepared to lay down their lives for their cause. The pick of the staunch Hurs are classified as Fakirs and Ghazis and their Namaz-e-Jenaza was offered in their life time.

In Sind there were many hereditary saints of different shades and character and they have exercised great influence over their followers. The masses in general are disciples of one Pir or the other. No one in Sind seeking religious guidance is without his Pir. The most celebrated of these Pirs was Sabghatullah Shah, Pir Pagaro of Kingri. He was a very strongly built man with penetrating eyes, broad shoulders a few small-pox marks on his face and was gifted with an excellent personality. He was invariably immaculately dressed. When giving an audience to his followers he wore a cap covered with gold and jewels and an expensive embroidered coat. He was alleged to have been fond of shooting and damsels and hence on visits to various areas, when unaccompanied by his family, he honoured well dressed pretty spinners offered to him for his nocturnal comfort.

Pir Pagaro had tremendous influence in Sind and in the States of Khairpur and Rajputana. The Hurs considered him almost a super natural being. He was literally worshipped—something entirely against Islam and its teachings. This influence, which varied from Pir to Pir,

*Hur (حر) is an Arabic word meaning free. Ahrar (أحرار) is its plural. This is the title given to the brave disciples of Pir Pagaro by Syed Ahmad Shah and Shah Ismail on their way to Balakote during Sikh occupation of the Punjab and the Frontier. Hur does not mean a murderer or a terrorist.

—Editor

ہندوستان کے شمال کی طرف، ہاشمی بن جلدیم، پیچہ لاہور، دکن

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صباح جمع

سفارش

خط دہلی

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was mostly hereditary and in case of Pir Sibghatullah Pagaro was partly due to his dominating personality. At this juncture I would like to state that it is beyond my comprehension as to how highly intelligent and educated and highly cultured people could become staunch followers of such Pirs.

Pir Pagaro seldom visited his followers in distant places but sent his Fakirs for the collection of his dues from distant disciples. Those who lived close to Kingri offered their periodical salutation and financial sacrifices in person. The murids raised money by the disposal of their best cattle and ornaments whereas in some cases ornaments were left, by the female folk, at the appointed place.



The Pir appeared on the platform on the left whereas the disciples collected in the open area in front of the Platform.

The Government officials in Sind displayed great regard for the Pir but a few Police officials took an active part in spreading wide propaganda damaging to the reputation of the Pir who was eventually arrested in 1930. On August 28 he was awarded eight years imprisonment for keeping his boy servant in a box and for being in illegal possession of arms and ammunition in spite of the fact that the witnesses failed to give evidence in the Court of Law to substantiate these allegations. The main reason for this state of affairs was that the British Government was bent on the arrest and punishment of the Pir hence the every kind of evidence was concocted and fabricated and the witnesses failed to utter lies and corroborate evidence in the presence of the Pir.

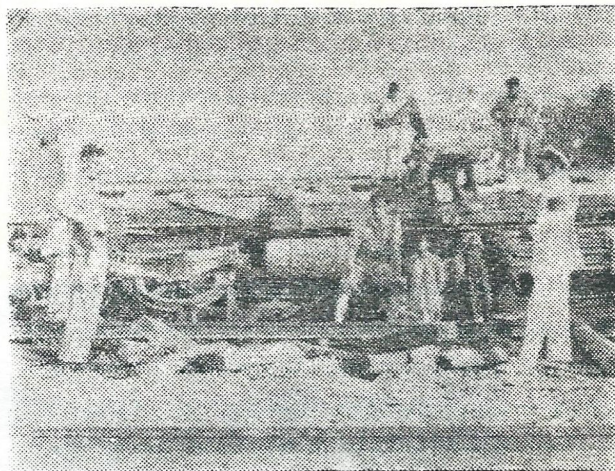
The Pir was then removed to a Jail and the Government imposed considerable restrictions on the Fakirs, who kept and struck to the faith and devotion to the Pir irrespective of the consequences. They decided to sit and starve themselves to death in front of the Government Offices so as to force the administration to release the Pir, but all in vain. However, the Pir returned to the area in October 1936 after the expiry of his sentence. The treatment accorded to him by the British Government made him very bitter and more anti-government, and thus he was an eyesore and his movements had to be kept under observation.

Soon after his return the Pir secretly carried out large scale enrolment and preparations for the over throw of British Government in Sind; and he is alleged to have stated that he was destined to become the King of Sind. The Rajput Rulers presented him with considerable amount of arms and ammunition which was distributed among his Fakirs in that area—as no gun license was required in this area. The Pir's Khalifas also collected large sum of money from the people for waging a holy war against the Government of usurpers. Knowing full well the consequences of the preparations for war he instructed the Fakirs that they should not be surprised in case the Pir was arrested but should continue to carry out sabotage work on a large scale.

In November 1939 riots started in Sukkur at the instigation of the Pir who felt that the Government was fully engaged in World War II and would not be in a position to put up resistance and hence he will be able to achieve his aim. With this end in view he directed all his efforts towards the creation of a serious law and order problem in the Province. In October 1941 the Pir was detained and later interned outside the Province. Prior to his removal from Karachi he managed to pass instructions to his Fakirs to play havoc in the area by carrying out large scale disruption activities so as to secure his release from detention.

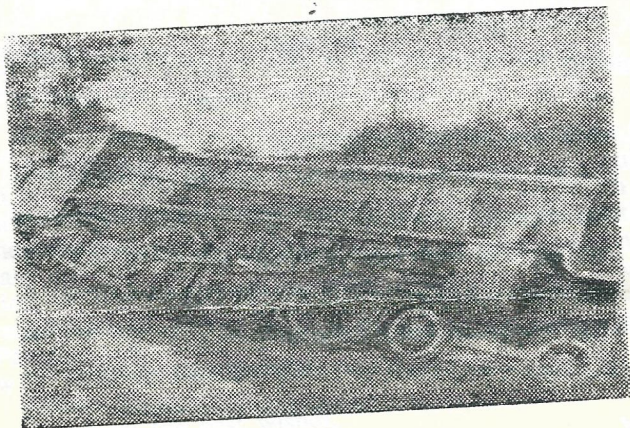
The Fakirs planned to paralyse the Government by looting, breaching canals, attacking railway stations and killing the staff, committing dacoities and eliminating trackers and informers working for the Government. For sobering and curbing the Hurs and other masses in the area, the police arrested a large number of people and put them through mock trials which resulted in exemplary punishments. Such an action did not deter the Hurs from carrying out their activities.

On 20th May 1942, after the completion of the Army Intelligence Course at Karachi, I decided to return to Lahore by the ill-fated Lahore Mail which was derailed in area Chaprao north of Hyderabad at about 9 p.m., by removal of the railway fish plates. The Hurs had apparently divided themselves into two parties that is the raiding and covering parties. The former under effective covering fire from the latter, entered the compartments and started looting and eliminating the passengers by the use of axes, guns and rifles. The total casualties being 32 killed and 100 wounded.



In the area of the incidents the railway line was on a high embankment and therefore at the time of derailment our compartment toppled over the top of a tree. The doors of the compartment got jammed so I broke the window pane and came out and then helped Capt. (Late Maj. General) Akhtar Malik to crawl out of the compartment, as we were exposed to the fire of the Hur covering party. The servants compartment was completely smashed so I started removing planks in search of my bearer Sahib Dad whom I presumed to be dead. Luckily I succeeded in my efforts and I was delighted to note that he was alive and not very seriously hurt. At his suggestion I went under the compartment and started looking for the Captain's orderly. The girders of the compartment had telescoped and it was a problem to remove the planks. However, after removing a couple of planks, I found the orderly in a crouched position, with a copy of the Holy Quran in lap, without an injury or scratch....All that I saw was beyond my comprehension. I thought this was a miracle.

Through the covering party's cordon I slipped two small parties towards the railway stations, on either side of the scene of incident, with a view to contacting senior railway officials for assistance through the Station Masters. The effort failed to pay dividend as the telephone lines had been cut in accordance with a well thought out plan. In the meantime we were busy rendering first aid to the casualties using the passengers turbans for bandages. It was due to sheer luck that we did not come across the raiding party otherwise we would have been mutilated like the other passengers.



Approximately half an hour after the derailment, a strong team of light appeared from the direction of Sukkur which gave the Hurs an impression that a relief train was approaching and hence they quickly disappeared from the scene before the said light faded away. The light could not be of the relief train as it arrived at about 11 a.m., the following morning. Now the question arises as to what could it be? The Providential miracle or a Car, with a very strong light approaching behind a crest. So far I have been unable to find a satisfactory solution to this phenomenon and hence I leave it to the readers and their guess work would be as good as mine if not better.

Immediately on the arrival of relief train the medical unit on board the train rendered first aid to the casualties and then evacuated them to various hospitals enroute. The other passengers rushed and occupied seats in various compartments. So far the idea of a cup of tea or food had not entered my mind as I was busy looking after the passengers but now all of a sudden I felt hungry and famished and I started in search of a first class restaurant on the railway station. The hunger of the other first class passengers was even more than mine as they swallowed whatever they could get from the hawkers on the railways station. However, we travelled merrily along departing at our respective railway stations to mark our hazardous journey and terrible experience.

MAG. GEN. (Rtd.)
WISAL MUHAMMAD KHAN
S.Pk. M.C. Pse.

TEL—TORU-2
TORU
MARDAN.
23rd Jan. 1980

My dear Shah Sahib,

Many thanks for your letter dated 18th instant delivered to me yesterday evening. I am glad to hear that all is well with you.

I have sent you a second instalment of articles.

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|----|------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| a) | Part II | Martial Law period | } in one envelope. |
| b) | " " (cont) | " " | |
| c) | " " —post. | " " | |

I have left out the information about the Pir's trial and burial due to security restrictions. As the said information would be of great public interest therefore I suggest that you should approach the Federal Government through the normal administrative channels for the publication of the said account. I feel that it would be a great tragedy if the said information is lost to the nation after I expire. The information under reference should have been down graded at the time of creation of Pakistan but being a careful person I am not prepared to take any risk with security classification.

With all the best wishes,

Yours Sincerely,

Sd/

(WISAL MUHAMMAD KHAN)